



Lenin's Year

Introductions to Archived Documents

January-April 1917

Dates given are "Old Style"

Communist University

Johannesburg

The Lenin's Year Archive is building at:

<http://studycircle.wikispaces.com/Lenin%27s+Year+-+1917+Archive>

9 January 1917, Lenin's Lecture on "Bloody Sunday"



Tracking Lenin's Year

In May, 1901, in "Iskra" #4, Lenin wrote an article called **"Where to Begin?"**

In the centenary year of the Proletarian Revolution in Russia it is again necessary to ask: Where to begin? Because **"Great October"** did not arise spontaneously on 7 November 1917.

Lenin's lecture given on the anniversary of the **"Bloody Sunday"** of 9 January 1905 (22 January in our calendar), shows why Lenin thought the 1905 Revolution was the moment when the Russian masses took on a revolutionary nature.

Lenin's lecture, given in Zurich on the 9th (22nd) January 1917, is attached.

Following on from Lenin's lecture the **CU** will continue to track the revolutionary centenary through Lenin's output, and build an archive.

To download Lenin's January 1917 Lecture on the anniversary of "Bloody Sunday,"

please [CLICK HERE](#)

22 February 1917: The February Revolution

The Wikipedia entry concludes: On 3 March a provisional government was announced. The centre-left was well represented, and the government was initially chaired by a liberal aristocrat, Prince Georgy Yevgenievich Lvov, a member of the Constitutional Democratic party. The socialists had formed their rival body, the Petrograd Soviet (or workers' council) four days earlier. *The Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government competed for power over Russia.*

The Soviet movement had actually originated in May, 1905, in the textile factory-town of Ivanovo, during the revolution of that year. The Soviets had developed as democratic organs of people's power.

The existence of the Soviets allowed for a period of Dual Power, followed by the complete replacement of the bourgeois-democratic state in a transfer of "all power to the Soviets".

It was Lenin who foresaw, and promoted, this possible route to socialism. He did so relentlessly, against constant opposition and backsliding on all sides.

Facts and chronology of the events of the February, 1917 Revolution are collected in a CU document, from Wikipedia, and from MIA.

To download the February Revolution Compilation in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

7 March 1917: 1st “Letter From Afar”



“Lenin’s Year” in the CU

The **Centenary of the Great October Revolution** is a study opportunity that we plan to exploit by walking through the year in step with Lenin, using his original documents as our main source and text.

We will also have an eye on the **main events** of the year, noting that each date of the old Russian calendar has an equivalent in our calendar, 13 days later.

These data will gradually be laid out in a **table**. Documents that we circulate will be in **booklet-printable PDF format**, archived at <http://studycircle.wikispaces.com/Lenin%27s+Year+-+1917+Archive>. This will be done gradually throughout the **Centenary Year**.

To download the 1st Letter From Afar, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Beginning Lenin’s Year

The first event and text was the 12th anniversary of the “Bloody Sunday” that began the **January, 1905 Russian Revolution**, and Lenin’s Zurich commemorative lecture on 9 January 1917 (22 January). **Lenin’s Lecture is archived** on the above-mentioned page.

Our second text is Lenin’s first “**Letter From Afar**”, written for “**Pravda**” after the February, 1917 Revolution, before Lenin’s return to Russia. Lenin stresses continuity with 1905, while saying that the **February Revolution**, although started by the proletariat, and pushed on by the women, was in the end only a “**regime change**” orchestrated by Britain and France.

9 March 1917, 2nd Letter From Afar (on Allies)



“Lenin’s Year” in the CU, continued

Lenin’s Year: **Guidance**

The **February Revolution** started on the 25th with a strike at the **Putilov Works** in Petrograd. The Tsar abdicated on 2 March. Lenin’s four “**Letters From Afar**” were written in Zurich between 7th and 12th March and sent to Sweden, from where **Alexandra Kollontai** took them to Russia. They were published on the day Lenin arrived in Petrograd, April the 3rd, 1917, and on the following day, in “**Pravda**.”

A fifth letter was drafted, but it was replaced by the “**April Theses**” that Lenin pronounced in Petrograd on the 4th. These writings record the vanguard stance that Lenin sustained from early 1917 through and beyond the **October Revolution**.

To download the 2nd Letter From Afar, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Alliances

In this document (2nd Letter From Afar) Lenin is discussing the possible revolutionary alliances, and drawing a line against the allies of international (especially British) capital and their local agents, the “**Guchkovites**” who had seized power, in “**regime change**” style, after the fall of the Tsar.

“**We consider it admissible for Social-Democrats to join a provisional revolutionary government together with the democratic petty bourgeoisie** [but not with the capitalists who would continue the war],” said Lenin.



“Lenin’s Year” in the CU: The State

Lenin’s Year: **The State**

The four **Letters From Afar** deal first with the historical perspective, then with the tactical politics of the moment, and now, in the 3rd Letter, with the nature of **the state** and the practical realisation of a proletarian dictatorship.

Lenin is blunt about **the state**. These words are directly relevant to the debates we are having about the state, in SA, in 2017. *If you read nothing else*, read these pages (4 and 5).

Lenin knew there must be a proletarian militia – **The People, Armed** – to prevent the re-imposition of the **special bodies of armed men** of the bourgeois state. **PDF follows.**

To download the 3rd Letter From Afar, please [CLICK HERE](#)

In Practice, the Women

On the second half of page 7 and the first half of page 8 of LFA3, Lenin describes “**the type of ‘state’ we need**” in practical terms. This passage includes the following:

“**If women** are not drawn into public service, into the militia, into political life, if women are not torn out of their stupefying house and kitchen environment, it will be *impossible* to guarantee real freedom, it will be *impossible* to build **even democracy, let alone socialism.**”

[The **4th letter** returns to the nature of Imperialism. Then, Lenin lays down the concrete “**Tasks of the Proletariat**” in the famous “**April Theses**”.]

12 March 1917, 4th Letter From Afar (on Peace)



“Lenin’s Year” in the CU: Peace

Lenin’s Year: **Peace**

The February Revolution began on 22 February 1917 and reached its conclusion on 2 March when the Tsar of Russia abdicated, leaving a situation of dual power between a bourgeois-parliamentary government, and the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies.

Lenin, in Zurich, concluded the **fourth “Letter from Afar” (on Peace)** on 12th March, while making arrangements to leave for Russia via Germany, Sweden and Finland. He arrived 3 weeks later with a fifth, summary document – **The April Theses**. Lenin read it out loud (twice) in Petrograd on 4 April 1917. He rejects the parliamentary republic, and demands that all power be transferred to the Soviets, and the establishment of a Communist International.

To download the 4th Letter From Afar, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Peace means...

In the 4th Letter from Afar peace is demanded in the specific terms of rejection of predatory bourgeois war aims, and the complete **abandonment of colonial appropriation** of territory.

The Russian Revolution was not only anti-Imperialist, but also anti-colonialist. It was for peace, but it was not pacifist. It demanded all power for **the armed people**. “The workers’ and peasant’s peace terms are **liberation of all colonies and liberation of all dependent, oppressed and unequal nations.**”

6, Lenin's Year – Lenin on the move



“Lenin's Year” in the CU: Lenin On The Move

Lenin's Year: **Lenin on the move**

We have already seen that Lenin, in January of the year 1917, anticipated in a Zurich lecture that **“popular uprisings under the leadership of the proletariat against the power of finance capital, against the big banks, against the capitalists”** were coming.

We have seen in the four “Letters from Afar,” that following the Russian revolution of 22 February to 2 March, Lenin got to work and laid down, between the 7th and the 12th of March, a comprehensive “way forward,” and sent it to Russia for publication.

Meanwhile difficult negotiations were under way to move Lenin and other exiles back from Zurich to Petrograd.

Click to download the three documents: [ONE](#), [TWO](#) and [THREE](#)

Lenin's Year: **Return of the Exiles**

“The Collegium Abroad of the R.S.D.L.P. Central Committee” in the face of hostile English obstruction, accepted a scheme for Lenin and others to go from Switzerland through Germany to another neutral country, Sweden, and from there to Russia via Finland.

The next two documents show that there were 30 or 32 comrades who made the trip. Their main problem was the refusal of the British and French belligerents to allow movements of exiles (émigrés). In the end, little time was wasted.

4 April 1917, Report of Lenin, “How We Arrived”

This document is Lenin’s formal report to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet on the arrangements by which he and his companions were able to return to Russia, from Switzerland, while the main intervening country, Germany was at war with Russia; and the other countries fighting Germany would not allow the Bolsheviks to pass.

To download this document in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

4 April 1917, Lenin's Year: The April Theses



“Lenin’s Year” in the CU: April Theses

Lenin’s Year: The April Theses

The April Theses, given verbally by Lenin in Petrograd on 4 April 1917, were the outline, but **not** the origin of the Great October Russian Revolution.

Lenin’s January, 1917 **Zurich Lecture** and the four **Letters from Afar** written after the February Revolution show that Lenin’s line of march had long been firmly set, clearly expressed, and actively pursued.

This revolutionary line originated even before the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP), in 1903.

The Theses are concise and, because given orally (twice), in full, and concretely, they escaped redaction. This was the 1917 revolutionary agenda, and it remained so.

To download The April Theses in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin’s Year: April Theses Demands:

Not the slightest concession to "revolutionary defencism;" power in the hands of the **proletariat and the poorest peasants**; rejection of the bourgeois Provisional Government; transferring the entire **state power to the Soviets** of Workers' Deputies; **abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy**; confiscation of all landed estates and **Nationalisation of all lands**; social **production and distribution** under the **control of the Soviets**;* a Party Congress and change of name to “**Communist**,” a (third, communist) **revolutionary International**.

Thus was the October Revolution outlined in April, by Vladimir Ilyich, Lenin.

9 April 1917, in Lenin's Year: The Dual Power



“Lenin’s Year” in the CU: Dual Power

Lenin’s Year: The Dual Power

“**The basic question of every revolution is that of state power,**” says Lenin at the beginning of “The Dual Power,” written 5 days after the delivery of the “April Theses”. This sentence **cannot** honestly be quoted to support the pursuit of victory in Parliamentary elections. It is part of an argument **against** Parliamentary or Constitutional power.

The Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies (proletariat plus peasants in soldiers’ uniforms) constitute “a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and not on a law enacted by a centralised state power.”

To download the document of Lenin on Dual Power in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

From Dual Power to People’s Power:

State power was a question of **overthrowing the government by direct seizure of power** by the majority, priorly organised as a second government. “**To become a power the class-conscious workers must win the majority to their side,**” said Lenin. He did **not** mean parliamentary elections.

“**Let us create a proletarian Communist Party,**” said Lenin, two weeks prior to the **Seventh All-Russia Conference** of the RSDLP. The Party was to grow along side of the mass democratic movement - not unlike the **NDR** as we know it.

“**The class alignment of forces determines our tasks,**” said Lenin.



Lenin's Year: Speech to Izmailovsky Soldiers

The day after “The Dual Power” document, Lenin spoke to the Izmailovsky Regiment. He said: **“The question of the state system is now on the order of the day.** The capitalists, in whose hands the state power now rests, desire a **parliamentary bourgeois republic**, that is, a state system where there is no tsar, but where power remains in the hands of the capitalists who govern the country by means of the old institutions, namely: the police, the bureaucracy, and the standing army. **We desire a different republic.”**

“End the war by concluding a lasting peace that will assure liberty to all peoples without exception,” concluded Lenin. **PDF to follow.**

To download Lenin’s speech to the Izmailovsky soldiers, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year, **One Message**

In the short speech to the Izmailovsky soldiers Lenin’s line is clear and plain. Only years of consistent communication can produce this degree of simplicity and directness. It is more evidence that the *October Revolution was not a putsch* and was not a surprise or an ambush, but it was something that had been building steadily for fifteen years or more, since long before 1905, under the watchful guidance of Lenin in particular.

We will continue to follow the progress of the 1917 Russian revolution through Lenin’s documents.



Lenin's Year: Letters on Tactics

Lenin's Year, **Letters on Tactics**

“My report gave rise to differences of opinion among the Bolsheviks themselves and the editors of *Pravda*. We unanimously concluded that it would be advisable *openly* to discuss our differences [pending] the All-Russia Conference of [the RSDLP] in Petrograd,” says Lenin. This is a polemic.

The tactics Lenin is talking about are no different to the ones that he had advanced on the 4th of April, which we know as “The April Theses”. “**I am deeply convinced that the Soviets will make the independent activity of the masses a reality more quickly and effectively than will a parliamentary republic,**” says Lenin.

To download Lenin’s Letters on Tactics in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year, **The Debate**

Lenin’s “Letters from Afar” had been redacted by the Pravda editorial board, which included Stalin and Kamenev, so as to be more polite to the Mensheviks. This had the affect of blunting Lenin’s message.

The terms of the debate allowed Lenin to re-sharpen the contradiction, in particular using polemic against Kamenev (Trotsky’s brother-in-law). **Lenin rejects the idea of building socialism from a basis of parliamentary democracy.** There is (in April) a “second government” that has *itself* ceded the power to the bourgeoisie, has chained *itself* to the bourgeois government. **The task is to win it back.**



Lenin's Year: Political Parties in Russia and the Tasks of the Proletariat

Lenin's Year, **Political Parties in Russia**

Soon after the agreement in early April 1917 among the Bolsheviks and the editors of *Pravda* to have an open discussion about strategy and tactics, Lenin prepared a pamphlet **“characterising the present political situation in Russia and the way it is understood by the various parties,”** in question-and-answer form.

This pamphlet of Lenin’s was for public consumption. It was a device for showing what were the main points of contention and who were the supporters of each side. It is a good example of how Lenin found different ways to make crucial scientific ideas understandable to masses of people.

To download Lenin’s “Tasks of the Proletariat” in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year, **Tasks of the Proletariat**

The question and answer form, touching all the contending parties, not only described these parties, but it also, in the process, unpacked the agenda of the revolution.

Most importantly, it touched on the question of dual power and of the State. It touched on peace and the arming of the revolutionary masses, and many other topics. Without undue stress, it clearly set out the **Tasks of the Proletariat**. This was excellent vanguarding.

25 April 1917, RSDLP(B) Conference, Speech on Soviets



Lenin's Year: Speech on the Attitude to the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies

Lenin's Year: **April, RSDLP(B) Conference, Speech on Soviets**

"The picture we now have disposes us to optimistic conclusions. The movement started out in the centres; initially all the energy of the proletariat there was concentrated on the struggle. A mass of energy was spent on the struggle against tsarism. This struggle in Petrograd has eliminated the central state power. A gigantic task has been done.

From the centre, the revolution is moving into the localities. **The greater the proletarian section of the population and the fewer the intermediate elements, the better the revolution advances.** Practical requirements have given the proletariat an absolutely correct definition of its tasks.

To download Lenin's speech to the RSDLP(B) Conference on Soviets, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year: **First Conference Speech, continued**

The sharper the class contradictions, the surer the dictatorship of the proletariat is realised. There is absolutely no ground for any pessimism.

The Russian people are not drawing their guiding principles from pamphlets. It is from the immediate practice that the experience of the masses flows. The people can work it out by participating in a mass movement and have started to accumulate mass experience. **Without this experience, the centres have nowhere to get an impetus from for a fresh revolution.** The new revolution is mounting. It is our task to accumulate this experience. *The Lenin's Year Archive is at:*

<http://studycircle.wikispaces.com/Lenin%27s+Year+-+1917+Archive>



Lenin's Year: Speech on the proposal for an International Socialist Conference

Lenin's Year: 25 April 1917, RSDLP(B) Speech on Danish proposal for a conference

In his short second speech to the RSDLP(B) conference, Lenin deals with yet another fake-left attempt to divert the revolution: **"This is a proposal coming from the German Government, acting through its own social-chauvinists.** It cannot do so openly, and is therefore doing it through its own Plekhanovs. **Borgbjerg's proposal is clearly nothing but a fraud and a swindle.** It is our task to expose the inner workings of this to the world. I move a draft resolution.

"The bourgeois newspapers know what the whole thing is about." **PDF follows.**

For Lenin's speech to RSDLP(B) on Danish Socialist Conference Proposal, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year: **Second RSDLP(B)Conference Speech - on Danish conference-proposal - cont.**

"Denmark is a petty-bourgeois country. Her bourgeoisie has battered on the war and hates the workers. The leaders of the Danish Social-Democratic majority are among the most opportunist in Europe. They have clearly exposed themselves as real social-chauvinists. I forgot to say that the Kautskyites have agreed to attend the conference.

"The German capitalists are bargaining because they are incapable of holding on to what they have seized. If we adopt this manifesto and have it printed and circulated, this will be a very genuine campaign and a clarification of the proletarian line." _The **Lenin's Year Archive** is at: _ <http://studycircle.wikispaces.com/Lenin%27s+Year+-+1917+Archive>



Lenin's Year: RSDLP(B) Conference, Draft Alterations to Programme

Lenin's Year: 27 April 1917, RSDLP(B) Conference, Draft Alterations to Programme

These are not minor alterations in the text of the RSDLP(B). They represent the thorough, fundamental takeover of the Party by Lenin's line. This is where the April Theses are adopted by Conference. Notable for South Africans is the statement that the new one **must not be a conventional type of state**.

Notable also is the classic Leninist definition of Imperialism that begins the document. This definition can hardly be surpassed.

The document defines "the social-chauvinist trend": **socialism in word and chauvinism in deed, the defence of the predatory interests of "one's own" national bourgeoisie** under the guise of "defence of one's country".

For Lenin's speech to RSDLP(B) on the New Programme in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year: **Second RSDLP(B) Programme alterations, *continued***.

This is a **minimum programme** (for unity-in-action). It proposes, not the "shortest road", but **the least painful transition to socialism**. It proposes **"the establishment not of a bourgeois parliamentary republic, but of a more democratic proletarian-peasant republic."**

"Supreme power in the state must be vested entirely in the people's representatives, in a single chamber. - i.e. not a constitutional, but a parliamentary sovereignty. Judges and all other civil and military officials are to be elected; banks are to be nationalised; police and army are to be abolished and replaced by the universally armed people.



Lenin's Year: RSDLP(B) Conference: Report on the Agrarian Question

Lenin's Year: 28 April 1917, RSDLP(B) Conference, Report on the Agrarian Question

The conference was dealing with everything, including what we call the **"Land Question,"** which Lenin treats, correctly, as a subsidiary part of the **"Agrarian Question."** The main considerations in Lenin's mind are: How are the people to be fed? How is famine to be avoided?

The starting point is **"the enslaving feudal relations remaining in the countryside."**

Lenin is aware that the immediate desires of the peasants are not compatible with making a living from the land, in the now-prevailing conditions of capitalist trade. **"The war has sharpened every contradiction,"** he says.

For Lenin's speech to RSDLP(B) on the Agrarian Question in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year: 2nd RSDLP(B) Conference, Report on the Agrarian Question, *continued*

Says Lenin: **"The necessity of land nationalisation, as a fully bourgeois and highly progressive measure, has been prepared by the preceding development of the land economy in Russia and the development of the world market."**

But: **"Just now, the immediate transfer of the land to the peasants is a demand powerfully dictated by the needs of wartime."**

The nationalisation of the land was more progressive, but the petty-bourgeois desire of each peasant **to own his land** was a stronger force.



Lenin's Year: RSDLP(B) Conference

Speech on the National Question

Lenin's Year: **29 April 1917, RSDLP(B) Conference, Speech on the National Question**

The Conference dealt with everything, as it was necessary to do so. This was the first legal party conference inside the country, equivalent to the ANC's 48th (1991, Durban) conference and the SACP's Crown Mines congress. A major item, dealt with on the last day, was **the National Question**.

In one page, Lenin sorts out this question. By reference to the different examples of Poland and of Finland, Lenin lays down two guiding rules, alpha and omega: **(1.) No violation of the will of the oppressed nations, and (2.) Everything for the international organisation of the proletariat.**

For Lenin's speech to RSDLP(B) on the New Programme in PDF, please [CLICK HERE](#)

Lenin's Year: **2nd RSDLP(B) Conference, Speech on the National Question, *continued***

Lenin says that, for the oppressed nations, the freedom to secede and the freedom to integrate must both be maintained, with one and the same aim: **proletarian internationalism.**

This formulation is guided by his understanding of the relation between the vanguard and the mass. **The vanguard is only effective if the people's will can be formed and carried out.** Power must be with the people. The formulation is also guided by the historical direction of class politics. **The national question cannot be solved within the bourgeois system.**